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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 005106

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NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: PRT JALALABAD: NANGARHAR GOVERNOR,S SECURITY
MEETING AND SUBSEQUENT ARREST OF TRIBAL ELDER

REF: KABUL 4917

Classified By: A/DCM Angus Simmons for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (U) SUMMARY: Nangahar Governor Gul Agha Sherzai called a special meeting with 200 elders and mullahs from the three southern districts on October 2 to discuss the escalating violence in the province, especially in the south. Representatives from each of the districts spoke, with members of the PRT and other Coalition Forces in attendance. Immediately following the meeting, Coalition Forces (CF) arrested one of the speakers, elder Zabid Zahir from Khogyana province. Zahir,s son and Provincial Shura Member Tahir Omar denied the charges that Zahir is a member of Hizbe-Islami Gulbbudin. The Provincial Council blamed the Governor and warned of demonstrations and protests if Zahir was not immediately released. Two days later, CF did release Zahir to the Governor, warning that the province could show its commitment to security through their treatment of Zahir.
END SUMMARY

12. (U) Nangahar Governor Gul Agha Sherzai invited mullahs from the districts of Khogyani, Pachir Wa Agam, and Sherzad to a meeting at his palace on October 2. The principal topic was the need for officials to work to stop the escalation of violence against the Coalition Forces and members of the international community in order for the province to retain its good reputation and continue to receive assistance. He also raised the issues of several recent arrests and searches of people,s homes by CF over the last few weeks. Other speakers included Provincial Shura Deputy Maulaw Abdul Aziz, elder Zabid Zahir from Sherzad, elder Haji Mohammad Kayum from Pachir Wa Agam, and elder Mir Zaman from Khogyani. Most comments were in support of the Governor.

13. (U) The Governor spoke first, referring to President Karzai,s recent trip to the U.S. and positive comments he

made about Nangarhar. (Comment: President Karzai had mentioned Nangarhar,s improvement in reducing poppy production in a CNN interview on "Larry King Live" and referred to the way Nangarhar solved problems in a press conference following his meeting with President Bush.) The Governor emphasized the important work that members of the international community were doing in Nangarhar and repeatedly warned that all of these efforts will end if the violence continues to increase. He specifically said that the PRT has been very generous and that "we have to help them" (probably referring to the September 17 ambush against a PRT Convoy in Sherzad District reported reftel). Another recent incident he mentioned was the September 28 IED attack in the Khogyani district against a convoy of clearly marked UN vehicles. The convoy was carrying construction contractors, including the Governor,s son, who were working on road improvements in the district. The Governor became increasingly emotional as he spoke (as he often does) and said that this is a time for a jihad for reconstruction. He announced that he would soon visit the three districts.

14. (C) Dr. Asif Qazizada, the influential Director of Canals, rose to thank the Governor for his generous support for the people of Khogyani. (Comment: This is ironic considering that he is suspected of being involved in the last two assassination attempts against the Governor.) Dr. Asif suggested that representatives of the different ministries should visit the districts before the Governor goes there. He encouraged the people in the districts to talk with the Taliban and convince them to give their support to peace and security.

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15. (U) Maulawi Abdu Aziz, Deputy Chairman of the Provincial Council, followed Dr. Asif and said that he was proud that President Karzai said Nangarhar province was a province of &peace and stability8. He directly addressed the members of the Coalition who were present, specifically the Special Forces sitting to his right. He told them that all agencies of the Afghan government were functioning well and CF needs to let Afghan security forces search for the insurgents. He referred to several recent controversial arrests and searches by CF and said they should simply ask Nangarhar officials to find the bad guys and bring them in. Members of the audience responded with loud support. (Comment: Aziz has suggested this strategy to the PRT Commander many times in the past. Most recently, the Commander asked Aziz to bring the people responsible for attacking the PRT convoy in Sherzad on September 17 to prove the viability of this approach, but nothing has happened yet.)

16. (C) Mir Zaman from Khogyani spoke next. He said that insurgents were coming from the other side of the border and what the province needed was a police chief (probably referring to the well-connected Afghan Border Police Director Haji Abdul Zahir, who was transferred to another province several months ago but has refused to leave. Several sources have told us that he will depart soon, but the official chosen to replace him has since been arrested.) Zaman said that thousands of people in Pachir Wa Gam were sacrificed during the Russian times, but that the Nangarhar government was strong because it was a Mujahideen government. He said that there are only two reasons for anti-coalition activity)- CF are searching homes for no reason and other provinces do not have a Mujahideen government.

17. (C) Zabid Zahir, tribal elder and father of Provincial Shura member Mohammad Tahir Omar, spoke on behalf of Sherzad district. Zahir is also the person who had exhibited questionable hospitality to the PRT convoy on September 17 (Reftel). His presentation was rather contradictory and confusing as he said that people need to share any information they had about anti-coalition activity and that he supported peace and stability one hundred percent. He then changed his tone to say there were serious land problems

caused by the government,s lack of control, declaring that the current government &is a joke.⁸ There was mixed audience reaction to this statement. Zahir said that if the government wants to stop poppy production, it needs to become aggressive and punish people. However, CF do not need to come in airplanes and be aggressive (apparently referring to an incident in which CF aircraft provided air support for a raid in the district). He warned that if CF continue this kind of activity, people will support the Taliban. He referred to another recent incident in which he said that CF had made a promise to his son about not arresting people if he brought them in to share information, and then they had broken their promise. (Comment: On September 30, his son Tahir Omar took Malik Asil and Malik Zaifur to speak with the Special Forces ODA at JAF following an ODA operation to exploit a suspected weapons cache in Sherzad. Asil and Zaifur were sought by the ODA and were subsequently detained. Tahir Omar claimed that ODA had promised that these two would not be arrested if he brought them in for an interview. Omar says that he felt betrayed and people in the district would no longer trust him.)

18. (C) The meeting ended with the Governor taking the podium to respond to the other speakers. He said that the government had made mistakes but was fixing them. As far as the controversial CF arrests, he explained that the President signed a UN decree to give CF their authority. However, he

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said that he had warned CF to be careful and make sure that they do not respond to allegations based on personal animosity rather than fact, and they should minimize their searches of people,s homes. (Comment: The Governor had privately told the PRT that he wanted to be informed before any future arrests were made, but he publicly defended CF authority for the arrests.)

ZABID ZAHIR ARRESTED

19. (C) Following the meeting, ODA and OGA met with the Governor to discuss arresting Zabid Zahir. The Governor indicated it would not be a good idea to arrest him at the palace but did not refuse their request. ODA met Zahir outside the front gate and took him to Jalalabad Airfield (JAF) for questioning, reportedly to avoid the possibility of a battle at Zabid Zahir,s massive compound in Sherzad. After a couple of hours of questioning, Zahir attempted to leave and was told that he would be staying. Tahir Omar, upset about the detainment of his father, immediately went to the Governor,s palace and met with Governor Sherzai at a &Break the Fast8 dinner, also attended by PRT Commander and Pol Officer. The Provincial Shura came to the palace, upset with the arrest, blaming the Governor for it.

THE RELEASE

110. (U) The following day, the Nangarhar Provincial Shura came to the PRT to discuss the situation and asked for assistance in obtaining the release of Zahir. They expressed concern that Zahir had been detained for disagreeing publicly with the Governor. Additionally, they were concerned that CF arresting individuals at the Governor,s palace undermined the authority of the Governor and made him look like he was being controlled by the CF. Finally, the Provincial Shura warned that there would be demonstrations, protests, and business closings if Zahir were not immediately released. PRT informed the Shura that Zahir was suspected of being a Hizbe-Islami Gulbbudin leader who supported attacks on the CF. Shura members had difficulty accepting these charges and claimed that it was personal animosity from the informants rather than fact.

111. (C) On October 4, the CF agreed to release Zahir to Governor Sherzai, and the PRT met with Provincial Shura

Chairman Fazalhadi Muslimyar. They stressed that Zahir was not being released as a result of the threats of protests, but due to the culturally insensitive way in which he was detained. Furthermore, it was made known that Zahir is suspected of supporting activities against the CF, and whatever the GOA did with him would demonstrate to the CF how serious the GOA was about improving security, since the Provincial Shura members have repeatedly requested that the CF hand over detainees to the GOA for prosecution through the Afghan court system. Muslimyar agreed and said he would recommend that Zahir be turned over either to the NDS or tribal elders. Zahir was released and eventually handed over to the elders of his tribe who guaranteed that he would not participate in activities involved with insurgents.

112. (C) COMMENT: This incident illustrates well the challenges of detaining and sorting out who is who in regions where tribal leaders and tribal relationships hold sway. The security situation in Nangahar is monitored closely by NATO forces in command of RC(E), the US-led CJTF-76. As a border province whose key location east of Kabul makes it a thoroughway for insurgent and AQAM infiltration, Allied

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forces are making every effort to cultivate strong partnerships with Provincial authorities and ANSF forces. Deliberate operations are underway and more being planned to target key enemy hot spots.

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